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## Friday Supplement

## Shankhadhar Sakhwa : Founder Of Nepal Samvat

Amar Prasad Joshi



Shankhadhar Sakhwa is believed to be the Founder of Nepal Samvat (Nepal Era) established on Kartik Sukla Pratipada 936 Vikram Samvat, Kachala-thva Saka Samvat 802 or on October 20, 879 A.D. He is recognized as a prominent member of the indigenous Newar community of the Kathmandu Valley. It is commonly believed that he lived in the vicinity of Maru Tole, the central area of Kathmandu, at a house known as Ilachhe near Kasthamandap. We however know very little about his lineage line and his family background, which remains a matter for future research.

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Raghav Deva Thakuri, the eldest of the three sons of Mana Deva of the Surya Dynasty, was believed to be the reigning king of Kathmandu at the time when Sankhadhar Sakhwa introduced Nepal Samvat. Similarly, the second son Jaya Deva and the youngest son Ananda Deva were ruling the kingdoms of Lalitpur and Bhaktapur respectively.

Once a certain learned astrologer named Siddhivanta of the Royal Court of Bhaktapur with his utmost dedication and scholarship happened to make an amazing prediction. He predicted that if the sand washed down at the holy confluence of the Vishnumati and Bhadramati rivers named Lakhu Tirtha can be collected on a certain auspicious day, at a certain time, the sand would be transformed into gold within the next four days. This knowledge derived from the royal astrologer was conveyed to King Ananda Deva of Bhaktapur.

In accordance with the royal astrologer's advice, the King ordered four workers to go to the holy confluence at the side of Vishnumati River in Kathmandu to collect the sand. Following the king's order, the workers made their way to Lakhu Tirtha site at the said time in the night. While carrying the sand on their way back, they rested for a while at a shelter in the Maru Tole locality known as Lukhan Phalcha. Certain people who happened to see the loads of

sand wondered why these were being carried during the night, and asked the workers out of curiosity. In reply, they revealed that King Ananda Deva of Bhaktapur had sent them to fetch the sand at the auspicious time. Thinking that there must be an important reason behind this royal assignment, one of the locals tried his best to buy all sand by offering the workers high wages, food and drinks. He thus persuaded them to deliver the sand at his house, and instructed them to take other loads of sand to Bhaktapur.

The one who bought the sand was no other than the wise and far-sighted Sankhadhar Sakhwa. The sand which was dug up for the second time from the same spot, however, did not turn into gold on the fourth day as this was not done at the said time. The king was very angry with the astrologer who in turn burnt the documents of the astrologers in frustration. Later, he came to know that the expected result could not be achieved as the sand was not obtained at the auspicious time.

Meanwhile, in Kathmandu, four days later, the sand had turned into heaps of gold particles. Shankhadhar was exulted by this amazing sight, and collected all the gold. As he then had a big fortune at his disposal, he devised a generous plan to spend these resources for the welfare of his countrymen. Accordingly, he consulted with many distinguished and respectable personages of the society including the priests, and proposed that he would pay off the debts of all the poor and oppressed people who were burdened by loans taken from the merchants and land-owners. He also committed himself to launch a new national calendar to coincide with his charitable act.

According to the law at the time, he paid a property tax of one-third of his assets to the government, and obtained permission from the king Raghav Deva to implement the Nepal Samvat in place of the Saka Samvat.

In recognition of his humanitarian act and to promote his name and reputation, the Council of Ministers headed by the then prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai announced Shankhadhar Sakhwa as a National Luminary on 16 November, 1999. (Mansir 2, 2056 V.S.) On the occasion, Bhattarai also appealed the intellectuals and scholars to conduct comparative studies and research on the life and times of Sankhadhar Sakhwa. It has been almost 10 years since Shankhadhar Sakhwa was declared a National Luminary, and yet no steps have been taken by the State to promote the Nepal Samvat he had founded. Since this calendar is of native origin, it should have come into use at the national level especially in the present context when the country has been declared a Federal Democratic Republic.

A Newar organization named 'Newaa Mahaguthi, Nepaa' constituted a committee named 'Sankhadhar Sakhwa Research Management Committee' to commission the historians, archeologists and intellectuals to initiate research work on the life of Shankhadhar Sakhwa. The Committee then invited proposals in various newspapers and journals with provisions for attractive prizes and remunerations for outstanding research reports.

Since then, various places and institutions in Nepal have been named after Shankhadhar Sakhwa, such as street names, cooperative and financial institutions, statues, parks, postage stamps etc. Such practices truly reflect the recognition of Shankhadhar Sakhwa's contributions to the welfare of Nepalese society. The Newar community in particular has also been very active in organizing rallies and processions with the slogan 'Nepal Samvat, a National Samvat' on the occasion of every New Year Day. This publicity will serve to make the ruling government realize the need to recognize and implement Nepal Samvat as the official calendar of the country.



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